



Testimony - HB 5037

An Act Adjusting the State Budget for the Biennium Ending June 30, 2023

Judicial Department Budget

Appropriations Committee- February 16, 2022

Senator Osten, Representative Walker, Senator Miner, Representative France, and members of the committee, thank you for taking the time to read our testimony. With the mission of working to end and prevent child abuse, the Connecticut Children's Alliance (CCA) urges you to support Governor Lamont's proposal to allocate \$14,865,300 in FY23 from the Coronavirus State Fiscal Recover Fund to the Judicial Branch to offset the expected reduction in Victims of Crime Act (VOCA) federal funds allocated to provide critical support to victim service agencies and the thousands of Connecticut residents served by these agencies.

Connecticut Children's Alliance (CCA) is the state's coalition for the 10 child advocacy centers (CACs) and 17 multidisciplinary teams (MDTs) charged with providing a comprehensive and collaborative response to all child victims of abuse through joint investigations, advocacy, evidence-based mental health treatment, specialized forensic medical exams and support, child focused forensic interviewing, support for non-offending caregivers, and connection to additional services designed to meet each victims on-going needs (see Public Act No. 17-190). Serving over 2000 unique victims of child abuse each year, our members heavily rely on VOCA funds to ensure each of those children and their families receive a timely coordinated response and the highest quality of care and on-going support. The anticipated 50% reduction in VOCA funding to our members and other victim service agencies that already struggle to serve every person who walks through their doors would create long-term devastating effects on top of those already endured as a result of the on-going pandemic. For the children and families served by our CACs and MDT response, a loss in funding this large could ultimately mean little to no access to life saving services in some areas, inadequate response times, and missed opportunities to intervene and reduce the long-term impacts of trauma.

It is important to note that the ask outlined in the Governor's proposal is to fill a temporary gap in VOCA funds. Initially, the VOCA fund was created using fines that resulted from criminal convictions. As we all know, not every case ends in a conviction and many cases result in deferred prosecutions or non-prosecution agreements but may still carry monetary penalties. However, until recently the monetary penalties in deferred prosecutions and non-prosecution cases were not included in the VOCA fund. The VOCA Fix Act, which passed last summer, now allows for such penalties to be included and should go a long way toward stabilizing the fund. Unfortunately, this doesn't fix the immediate issue and it's estimated that there will be a 50% decrease in funds available for all states over for the next two years until the fund is replenished based on the new contribution structure. Until then, our victim service agencies are in danger of not having the resources to retain employees and provide the critical services needed by victims and survivors. Now more than ever our victims and survivors of crime need our support. This temporary support presented in the Governor's proposal would allow critical services to continue while additional funds are collected as a result of the federal VOCA Fix Act.



We strongly encourage you to support this proposal for FY23 and, if possible, extend this support through FY24 to ensure no child abuse victim or any victim of crime goes without the critical services they deserve.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

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